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ABSTRACT

This study investigated teacher efficacy in the context of diversity, focusing on: whether elementary school teachers' feelings of efficacy would differ according to their students' language backgrounds; whether the teachers' feelings of efficacy in teaching standard English speaking students would relate to their feelings of efficacy in teaching non-English speaking students; and whether, if teachers' feelings of efficacy differed by student language background, those differences would vary according their own ethnic identities, their participation in diversity training, and the interaction between their own ethnic identities and their participation in diversity training. Data from surveys of 234 public elementary teachers across Connecticut indicated that there was a clear connection between student language background and teacher efficacy. The results also suggested that teacher efficacy is more fluid than previous research has indicated, so it can be influenced by teacher preparation and professional development. No differences in teacher efficacy by student language background were found on the basis of teacher ethnicity. The results indicated that diversity training did not affect teacher efficacy favorably. (Contains 47 references.) (SM)

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Teacher Efficacy and Diversity:

Implications for Teacher Training

by

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Introduction

The function of the public school institution from its inception has been to reinforce and preserve the status quo (McLaren, 1994). However, today's classrooms are not static. Poverty and diversity bring conflicts over what to teach and how to teach it (Garcia, 1993; Nelson, Carlson, & Palonsky, 1996; Orrill, 1994) and the role of education has moved to acculturation (Valverde, 1993). Teachers are not adequately prepared for these conditions (Ashton, 1996). They face culture shock when their world becomes unpredictable and a sense of powerlessness undermines their sense of self-efficacy (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Low self-efficacy is reflected in teachers' commitment to the profession (Lee & Smith, 1996; Louis & Kruse, 1995), in their confidence (Oakes, 1990), in lowered aspirations for themselves (Rosenholtz, 1991), and in lowered expectations for their students (Ashton, Webb & Doda, 1983). As teachers' feelings of efficacy decline, students learn less. Once such a pattern is established, it becomes difficult to elevate a teacher because other institutional and organizational factors such as isolation and lack of supervisory support (Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990) further erode their feelings of efficacy.

Background of the Study

Communication forms the basis of our educational process, but language can be an obstacle to effective communication (LaBelle & Ward, 1994). Studies have confirmed that language different students often are placed in lower-track programs (Oakes, 1985, 1990) and teachers assigned to lower-track classes experience lower efficacy (Raudenbush, Rowan & Fai Cheong, 1992). While reading group placement decisions, as examined by Haller (1985), appeared not to be racially driven, a connection between

placement and language, in the context of reading ability and vocabulary knowledge, was implied. Language seems to be one of the criteria for placement in lower-track programs that are populated with nonstandard English and non-English-speaking students. While a link between diversity and teacher efficacy was not examined in any of these studies, the possibility of such a link could be implied. Teachers of lower-track programs or classes, populated with students who do not have command of the standard English utilized in schools, seem to have lower efficacy than their colleagues in higher-track classes with students who do speak standard English.

Student diversity can be defined in a variety of ways. In this study, student language background was utilized as an approximation for student diversity. This made an examination of teacher efficacy in the context of student diversity possible with specific student language backgrounds as attribute independent variables.

One recommended solution to the problem of lowered teacher efficacy in diverse classrooms has centered on promoting the entrance of minorities to the teaching field. Advocates for school reform express dissatisfaction with the lack of minority representation at the front of the classroom (Banks, 1994; Foster, 1993; Gay, 1993; Nieto, 1996). Only 13% of all teachers are minorities (National Education Association, 1992). With the expected growth in the minority student population, clearly there is a tremendous need for more minority teachers. But, while minority teachers may be able to relate to students of the same cultural background (Foster, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994), it is a giant leap of faith to assume that these teachers will be more successful and have a greater sense of efficacy. Whether minority teachers' sense of efficacy is stronger than that of majority teachers' efficacy when faced with diverse students has never been

examined. In addition, it is unreasonable to conclude that every group can be represented at the classroom helm. All teachers, majority and minority alike, face students whose cultural and language backgrounds differ from their own. Also, bringing minorities into the teaching pool requires a prolonged time-frame, so, ways to address the teacher efficacy issue must move forward regardless of the promotion of minority teaching candidates. This study opened the door to questions about the differences in efficacy between majority and minority teachers, a second attribute independent variable.

The depth and breadth of the problems affecting teachers' feelings of efficacy have not gone unnoticed. Professional development programs focusing on diversity issues have proliferated and some professional teacher certification programs have made attempts to include appropriate field experiences with diverse populations for their trainees. Both field experiences and professional development should be vehicles for providing teachers with the tools to work effectively with diverse groups. Such training should result in increases in teachers' feelings of efficacy as they develop a repertoire of knowledge about diversity issues and the skills upon which to draw. Some success has been reported in teacher preparation programs requiring 'cultural plunges' and other extended awareness and sensitizing programs (Hones, 1997; Lawrence, 1997; McCall & Andringa, 1997; Tran, Young & DiLella, 1994). But, because service learning has only recently been accepted and considered as a means of improving student learning, the long-term effects have not be measured.

Research examining the outcomes of diversity training programs have concluded that brief in-service programs do little to change teachers' attitudes (McDiarmid, 1992; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter, 1993) because adult learners filter new situations through an already-

developed concept map (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997). Most follow-up studies of professional development have investigated changes in teachers' attitudes about diversity and racism but have not addressed changes in teacher efficacy. What effect diversity training, in either preservice training or professional development forms, has on teacher efficacy has remained completely unexplored.

Research Questions

To explore teacher efficacy in the context of diversity, the following research questions guided this study:

1) Do elementary teachers' feelings of efficacy differ according to the language backgrounds of their students?

2) Are elementary teachers' feelings of efficacy in teaching standard English-speaking students related to their feelings of efficacy in teaching students with other language backgrounds, namely, nonstandard English, or non-English languages?

3) If elementary teachers' feelings of efficacy differ by student language background, do these differences vary according to teachers' own ethnic identities?

4) If elementary teachers' feelings of efficacy differ by student language background, do these differences vary according to teachers' participation in diversity training?

5) If elementary teachers' feelings of efficacy differ by student language background, do these differences vary according to the interaction of teachers' own ethnic identities and their participation in diversity training?

Research Methodology

To collect data, a survey instrument was mailed to a stratified random sample of elementary public school teachers across the state of Connecticut. Two-hundred thirty-

four teachers responded to the survey. Through purposive sampling, a higher proportion of minority teacher respondents than is reflected in the actual elementary teaching population in the state was obtained. In all other respects, namely, the average number of years of teaching experience, the distribution among urban, suburban and rural school districts, the respective wealth of those districts, and the distribution of teachers from kindergarten through grade 5, the sample was reflective of the elementary teaching population in Connecticut.

The survey instrument used was a modified version of the Teacher Efficacy Scale devised by Gibson and Dembo (1984). Sixteen items required response (using a 6-point Likert-type scale) on each of the identified student language groups. This provided opportunity to differentiate responses based upon experience with the three identified student language groups. Twelve demographic questions addressed teachers' personal backgrounds and professional experiences. Several of these questions acted as data sources for the remaining two independent dichotomous variables, teacher ethnicity and teacher participation in diversity training.

Construct validity for teacher efficacy was examined and substantiated by Gibson and Dembo in their 1984 seminal research. Reverse coding of seven items corrected for negatively stemmed statements to address questions of internal validity. Although the Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency reliability results in this study fell slightly below the minimum desired level of .70 (Morgan & Griego, 1998), the standardized item alphas all met the .70 reliability benchmark.

Content validity was the most serious threat in the interpretation of results. Teachers could have used a different definition or standard, such as race or socio-economic status,

when responding for the different student language groups. To lessen such impact, each language group was carefully defined in the instrument and only those surveys in which participants responded for each of the student language background groups were used.

Data Analysis

The five research questions addressed in this study called for both difference and complex associational inferential statistics to examine the dependent variable, teacher efficacy.

A comparison of responses according to student language group through paired samples t tests addressed a question of difference. Bivariate relationships between teacher efficacy for standard English-speaking students and teacher efficacy for the other student language backgrounds required Pearson product moment correlation procedures to determine the degree of association. Several single fixed factor between groups design research questions called for analysis of variance (ANOVA). The purpose of these test procedures was to determine if differences in teacher efficacy by student language background vary according to teachers' own ethnic identities and according to teacher participation in diversity training. Because this study was nonexperimental in nature, the unequal cell sizes made the use of the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to address the interaction of the independent variables somewhat unreliable. MANOVA was executed simply to identify and examine differences that otherwise would go unexplored.

Results

The 3 t test results for Research Question # 1 indicated that the means for teacher efficacy for each language pair differed significantly from each other as shown in Table 1. While the significance of the mean differences were evident from these t tests, the

question of whether teacher efficacy is a general, fixed trait, with little or no variability by student language group, remained unanswered by these test results. A determination of the existence and strength of the relationship of teacher efficacy for each of the paired student language groups was needed to show if and where variability in teacher efficacy might exist.

This was explored using the Pearson correlation. All 3 correlations were significant at the $p < .01$ level. A stronger relationship existed between nonstandard English and non-English than between nonstandard English and standard English. Only a moderate positive relationship existed between the standard English and non-English language groups.

Table 1

T tests Comparing Means for Teacher Efficacy by Student Language Backgrounds

	Paired Differences					
Paired Sample	M	SD	SE of M	t	df	sig. (2-tailed)
Std. Eng./ Nonstd. Eng.	.18	.36	.03	5.134	110	.000
Std. Eng./ Non-Eng.	.28	.47	.04	6.326	110	.000
Nonstd. Eng./Non-Eng.	.11	.29	.03	3.811	110	.000

While the correlations were positive and moderate to high, the associations were not perfect. Teacher efficacy is a measure of teachers' feelings of effectiveness regardless of the student language groups involved. Further investigation of internal factors or teacher characteristics became necessary to identify sources of this variability. An investigation of one identified teacher characteristic, teacher ethnicity, was initiated to determine if it was a source of the variability.

Because all teachers, majority and minority alike, utilize standard English in the classroom, analysis of the standard English student language group was deemed inappropriate. Variability in teacher efficacy with standard English-speaking students should be attributed to factors other than language and such factors were not a part of this study. The results of the ANOVA for effects of teacher ethnicity on teacher efficacy by student language backgrounds indicated no significant differences for majority or minority teachers. Only 1.1% of the variance in teacher efficacy by student language groups was due to teacher ethnicity. This suggested that the ethnicity of the teacher has little bearing on feelings of efficacy in this context.

While no significance in teacher ethnicity was noted, their participation in diversity training proved differently. As before, standard English was not included in this analysis for several reasons. First, diversity training is usually directed toward improving opportunities for learning for those students whose language backgrounds are not standard English. Second, it has already been established that teachers' feelings of efficacy are highest with standard English-speaking students. Changes in teacher efficacy as a result of diversity training would impact efficacy ratings for nonstandard English and non-English, but not standard English.

As shown in Table 2, the multivariate test of significance for diversity training revealed significant differences in teacher efficacy by student language background. Diversity training accounted for 9.6% of the variance in teacher efficacy by student language group. These statistics demonstrate that diversity training is a significant factor in teachers' feelings of efficacy regarding students who speak nonstandard English or whose native language is something other than English.

Table 2

Analysis of Variance for Effects of Diversity Training on Teacher Efficacy by Student Language Background

		F	
Source	df	Nonstd. English	Non-English
Diversity Training	1	6.662*	11.277***
Within Grp. Error		(.275)	(.300)

Note: Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors.
*p< .05, ***p< .001.

Although the univariate results reported above should not be considered when multivariate results indicate no significance, the nonexperimental nature of this study precluded the use of the mulitvariate procedure. MANOVA was executed to obtain majority and minority teacher efficacy means for non-English and nonstandard English-speaking students based upon teachers' diversity training experience. The means obtained from this procedure indicated that majority teachers' efficacy improves for both non-English and nonstandard English-speaking students when teachers have participated

in diversity training, shown in Table 3. In this study, diversity training for minority teachers enhanced their efficacy with non-English-speaking students, but there appeared to be no improvement in efficacy with nonstandard English-speaking students. The greatest impact for both teacher groups appeared with non-English-speaking students and confirmed the earlier ANOVA results.

Table 3

Majority and Minority Teacher Efficacy Means by Diversity Training Experience for Student Language Groups

Non-English/Nonstd. English		Training	
		No	Yes
Ethnicity	Majority	3.71/3.88	4.15/4.23
	Minority	4.01/4.18	4.15/4.18

Interpretation

Prior to this research, the connection between student language background and teacher efficacy had been implied but not verified. The initial t tests conducted in this study established a clear connection between these two variables. Additionally, this research is unique in that it examined teacher efficacy in several contexts concurrently. The results suggest that teacher efficacy is more dynamic and fluid than much of the literature suggests. Teacher efficacy is important because the findings of prior research studies have established the existence of a relationship between teacher efficacy and

student achievement. The fluidity of teacher efficacy is important because it establishes that teacher efficacy can be influenced through teacher preparation and professional development.

What, specifically, should be addressed in those programs to improve teachers' feelings of efficacy has remained elusive. This study has identified student language as one variable in teacher efficacy. Although it would seem intuitive that teachers who have high feelings of efficacy with standard English-speaking students would also have high feelings of efficacy with other student language groups, the correlations were not perfect. The strength of the relationship between nonstandard English and the non-English language groups was surprising and holds serious implications for high minority schools.

Urban schools, which typically have high minority student populations, frequently resort to filling teacher shortages with uncertified or misassigned teachers (Haberman, 1986). Lack of adequate preparation, either in teaching methodologies or in subject matter content, will certainly be reflected in lower feelings of efficacy. The research of Oakes (1990) found that inner-city teachers did express less confidence than their counterparts in wealthier suburban schools. The current research extends Oakes' findings by identifying an important factor in lower efficacy among teachers of diverse groups and further substantiates the need for programs that enhance teacher efficacy with minority student groups.

A proposed solution to this is the diversification of the teaching force (Darling-Hammond, Hudson & Kirby, 1989; Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Nieto, 1996; Stoddart, 1990). While the lack of representation in the teaching work force is itself a prime example of institutional and Eurocentric barriers influencing entrance to the profession, it is a stretch

to assume that minority teachers will experience greater success with language different students and have higher self-efficacy ratings than their majority colleagues. In this study, no differences in teacher efficacy by student language background were found on the basis of teacher ethnicity. The lack of difference in teacher efficacy by ethnicity seems to contradict the assumption that expanding the workforce to include more minorities will result in higher academic achievement by minority students. While other benefits may accrue from pursuing minority teaching candidates, no appreciable difference or improvement in teacher efficacy can be expected.

According to Stoddart (1990), teachers expect or want to teach students of backgrounds similar to their own. Banks (1994) found teachers to be "highly assimilationist oriented" (p. 86). In assimilation, according to Kolb (1984), one's own concepts and perceptions take precedence over the realities of the environment. Teachers' expectations may include the use of standard English in the school setting. It may be that language background has become one variable in teachers' definition of 'similar'. Language difference among students in the classroom is then reflected in lower feelings of efficacy by the teacher. This may be indicative of the Eurocentric institutionalized disposition of teachers and supports those who advocate for a more socially and culturally responsive and responsible educational system (Banks, 1993; Banks & McGee-Banks, 1989; Gay, 1989; Sleeter, 1996).

Most current definitions of multicultural education are congruent in their insistence on transformative processes. Pewewardy (1994) described culturally responsive pedagogy as preserving cultural heritage, preparing students for meaningful relationships and successful lives, and maintaining their cultural identities. To achieve this, teachers must

recognize the multiple perspectives of students so that these perspectives permeate their instructional thinking (Hyun & Marshall, 1997).

Kolb (1984) has suggested that formal education and career selection form the basis for his second stage of experiential learning, specialization. As most teacher preparation programs focus on pedagogical skills and most teachers were raised and educated in white middle-class communities (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997), clearly teachers lack diversity experiences. Gay (1997) reported that one of the major assumptions in the implementation of multicultural education is that teachers can effectively implement such programs without training or meaningful cultural experiences.

Improving teacher efficacy in the context of student language diversity should be a goal of diversity training. The results of this study suggest that diversity training does appear to affect teacher efficacy favorably. Other variables that have been found to be related to efficacy include age and prior work experience (Chester & Beaudin, 1996). Older teachers, even those who had only recently joined the teacher ranks, consistently rated self-efficacy higher than younger, less-experienced teachers. Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning suggests that integration, or personal fulfillment through active selection and interpretation of meaningful experiences, requires significant time for work and life experiences, and is possible only in more mature individuals. Efficacy and integration appear to run parallel courses.

Research on alternate certification programs seems to support this. Programs that promote teaching as a second career attract more minorities and men (Darling-Hammond, Hudson & Kirby, 1989; Stoddart, 1990) and also bring older, wiser individuals to the profession (Haberman, 1991). These researchers concluded that

alternate-route teachers were more willing and able to teach culturally diverse populations. While the current study did not investigate efficacy by type of preservice program or by age, it seems reasonable to conclude that these teachers possess a stronger sense of efficacy than younger teachers whose life experiences may be somewhat limiting.

Recent attempts to integrate diversity and cultural awareness in preservice programs have met with mixed results. Lawrence (1997), in an ethnographic study of three student teachers, examined how changes in racial identity development were reflected in classroom practices. Those demonstrating the most progress were those who were more mature (in age) or who, by choice, had participated in several courses focusing on race and racism, indicating a preparedness for critical reflection. Research by Hones (1997) found similar results in a service learning action research study. Service learning modules, Hones reported, can be beneficial only if candidates are carefully selected and placed.

In this study, the average number of years of teaching experience of survey respondents was 16 years, closely matching the Connecticut statewide average experience of 15.2 years. The study did not evaluate differences in feelings of efficacy based upon the number of years of teaching experience for those with diversity training. There is always the possibility that most teachers in the sample with diversity training also had extensive work and life experience, making them ideal candidates for such training. Because this was not a part of this study, an evaluation of the optimum time-frame for participation in diversity training programs is needed.

The importance of integrating academic education and field experience education has been emphasized by Kolb (1984). What remains at issue is the "when" of these components. Should service learning be integrated into preservice programs for all teacher candidates, or can greater benefit be derived after the passage of time, building upon both work and life experiences? Alternatively, can selection criteria be developed that will facilitate the introduction of diversity training to teachers or candidates when it will mesh closely with their own experiential learning development?

In addition, the content, intensity and duration of diversity training programs also requires exploration. Further research to determine the core and situation-specific elements of diversity training programs required for meaningful professional development is needed. Meaningful enhancements to teacher preparation programs must be designed and implemented with longitudinal research conducted to examine their long-term impact.

Conclusions

The measurement of teacher efficacy in most studies has almost always led reviewers to conclude that teacher efficacy is a constant. This is troubling as low teacher efficacy has been correlated with low student achievement and it might be concluded that efforts to improve student achievement through improvements in teacher efficacy would be futile. This study began with the premise that teacher efficacy is variable, that is, changing in different contexts or with different experiences. Because it is variable, steps can be taken on several fronts to enhance teacher efficacy.

1) Universities, in conjunction with state departments of education, should establish and promote alternate route teacher certification programs that draw diverse individuals with more life experience to the profession of teaching.
2) Teacher preparation programs should establish and implement candidate selection standards for participation in service learning modules in their training programs.
3) Participation in service learning modules should be required components for teacher certification.
4) Multiple, extended-time cultural experiences should be offered as a vehicle for movement by teacher candidates along the continuums of racial identity and experiential learning development.
5) For those already teaching, professional development programs that recognize the various stages of experiential learning development in teachers should be developed.
6) School districts, schools of education, and professional development organizations, such as regional service centers, should tailor diversity training efforts to site-specific elements, making professional development meaningful and immediately practical.

Improved teacher training and professional development programs can provide teachers with the experiences they may lack in their own personal lives. Proper selection, preparation and appropriate ongoing support can help to ensure that teachers are confident of their abilities as they proceed into diverse classrooms. Increased focus on enhancing teacher efficacy in the context of student diversity can lead to improvements in student achievement, particularly for minority and language different students.

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